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Foster care lawsuit widens

Activists claim Michigan unfair to kids in its care

February 15, 2007

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A federal judge in Detroit on Wednesday certified a lawsuit brought against the State of Michigan by a New York-based children's rights organization as a class action with the potential to affect the lives of nearly 19,000 foster children.

U.S. District Judge Nancy Edmunds said, after reviewing written briefs and verbal arguments from lawyers for the advocacy group Children's Rights and the state Attorney General's Office, that she would certify the case as a class action.

The lawsuit seeks to force the state Department of Human Services to adequately provide for the safety, well-being and permanency of foster children.

Children's Rights, which has successfully sued other states and counties over foster care problems, argues that Michigan's foster care system routinely violates the constitutional rights of foster children by denying them adequate services such as finding permanent adoptive homes.

The lawsuit was filed in August on behalf of six foster children identified by first names or last initial only.

Synopses of those children's lives in state care show they were moved frequently between foster homes and denied the services needed to overcome serious physical, mental health and behavioral problems. Three of the children are teenagers with problems such as fetal alcohol syndrome who have spent long periods in shelters, not foster homes.

No trial date for the lawsuit was set.

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February 15, 2007

Class-action status for foster care suit

Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News

U.S. District Judge Nancy Edmunds said Wednesday she would grant class-action status within two weeks to a lawsuit filed against the state on behalf of Michigan's 19,000 foster children.

The suit, filed in August by New York-based Children's Rights, alleges that Michigan's foster care system has been plagued by shortcomings in resources and services for years.

As a result, the suit alleges, abused and neglected children are suffering from a lack of physical and mental care and are repeatedly moved from one home to another.

It points to the 6,300 children available for adoption who are growing up as state wards, along with the 40 percent of children in unlicensed foster care homes.

In addition to the Michigan lawsuit, Children's Rights has been in negotiations with the Michigan Department of Human Services.

Marcia Lowry, Children's Rights executive director said, "One way or another, we are committed to seeing the child welfare system reformed."

Michigan Department of Human Services spokeswoman Karen Stock declined to comment, saying the judge has not issued an order.

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Judge To Grant Class-Action Status In Foster Care Suit

POSTED: 6:45 am EST February 15, 2007

UPDATED: 7:50 am EST February 15, 2007

DETROIT -- A federal judge said she will grant class-action status to a lawsuit seeking reforms in Michigan's foster care system.

U.S. District Judge Nancy Edmunds in Detroit said Wednesday she would grant the class-action status on behalf of the state's 19,000 foster children within two weeks.

The suit was filed in August by the New York-based Children's Rights. It alleges that the state's foster-care system has for years been plagued by shortcomings in resources and services that have resulted in inadequate physical and mental care and foster children being repeatedly moved between homes.

It cites the 6,300 children available for adoption who are being raised as wards of the state as well as the 40 percent of children living in unlicensed foster homes.

Michigan Department of Human Services spokeswoman Karen Stock declined to comment, saying the judge had not yet issued an order.

Children's Rights has successfully sued other states and counties over foster care problems.

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Michigan Report

February 14, 2007

FEDERAL JUDGE CERTIFIES CLASS ACTION SUIT AGAINST STATE

A U.S. District judge in Detroit on Wednesday certified a class action lawsuit challenging the state's practices in its child foster care system.

The lawsuit is being brought against the state by the New York-based group Children's Rights that charges the state has failed to provide adequate services to protect children in the foster care system.

The lawsuit charges the state violates the constitutional rights of foster children by not finding them permanent homes. In arguments before the court, Children's Rights said the state has been unable to find homes for some 6,200 children now classified as state orphans because their parents have had their parental rights terminated.

The state argued that each of the children was provided an attorney and that the best way to deal with the individual situations was through the judicial system.

The lawsuit was initially filed last August using six foster children as plaintiffs. On Wednesday Judge Nancy Edmunds certified the class for the class action effort.

Children's Rights has issued similar suits in other states.

Feb 15, 12:47 PM EST

Woman accused of killing 2 daughters to undergo competency exam

SHELBY TOWNSHIP, Mich. (AP) -- A judge has ordered a 30-year-old suburban Detroit woman accused of fatally stabbing her two daughters to undergo an evaluation to determine whether she is competent to stand trial.

Jennifer Kukla, of Macomb County's Macomb Township, appeared in district court Thursday on two counts of first-degree murder in the Feb. 4 slayings of her 8- and 5-year-old daughters.

Defense attorney Steven Freers asked Judge Douglas Shepherd to refer Kukla to a forensic center in Ypsilanti for testing and to determine whether she was criminally culpable.

"She doesn't seem to have a real good contact with reality," Freers said.

Kukla is expected to return to court in 30 to 45 days after the examination has been completed.

Police discovered the bodies, along with those of three dogs and a pet mouse, inside the mobile home they shared about 11 hours after Kukla allegedly told them the killings took



THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Parents get prison for abusing baby

Child doing well in foster care

Thursday, February 15, 2007

First-time parents Christina Burke and Christopher Bunge are both headed for prison after authorities say they abused their infant son, causing at least 10 broken bones.

The couple appeared in court Tuesday before Judge Donald Shelton, who sentenced the father at the top end of state guidelines and sentenced higher than state guidelines in the mother's case.

Last month, Bunge pleaded guilty to first-degree child abuse, and Burke pleaded guilty to second-degree child abuse. When he accepted their plea, Shelton agreed to sentenced them within state guidelines.

But on Tuesday, Shelton ordered Burke to spent 12 to 48 months in prison - above the guidelines of no prison time to 17 months, according to prosecutors. Burke, 19, had a chance to withdraw her plea since the sentence violated the agreement, but she chose not to do that, prosecutors said.

Bunge, 23, will spend five to 15 years in prison for the abuse. State guidelines called for 36 to 60 months, prosecutors said.

The couple was arrested in late October after they brought their then 4-month-old son to the University of Michigan Medical Center with a swollen foot. Physicians found at least 10 broken bones in the infant's body, including fractures to his arms, legs and ribs, and a fractured skull. The injuries were in various stages of healing.

Ann Arbor Police said the parents, who had previously been homeless before moving in with Burke's father, admitted they had been rough with the child.

Authorities said this week that the boy was placed in foster care and is doing well.

By staff reporter Amalie Nash

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THE DAILY Reporter

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No contest plea entered in Hale child abuse case

[Print Page](#)

By Don Reid-Staff Writer

COLDWATER — Jonathan Hale, 28, will be sentenced on March 23, after he pleaded no contest on Wednesday to one count of third degree child abuse, a two-year maximum, high-court misdemeanor.

The trial had been delayed on felony charges of first degree and second degree child abuse after defense attorney J. R. Colbeck moved to withdraw as counsel for Hale.

The motion came after a jury in December 2006 found his then girlfriend, now wife, Brandalyn Wertz-Hale, 24, guilty of second degree child abuse "by reckless act," the lesser offense charged against her.

The stepmother was accused of not providing adequate water to the two-year-old daughter and four-year-old son during visitation from Memorial Day until June 6, 2003. Both were dehydrated and near death when rushed to the special pediatric unit of Bronson Methodist Hospital.

Branch County Assistant Prosecutor Terri Norris said the plea offer was made for several reasons. Prosecutors went to trial against the stepmother because the case against her was the strongest. After the first trial, there did not seem to be the evidence necessary to convict the father of the most serious charges.

The father had less time with the children during the week's visitation. His plea was to a charge that indicates he did not overtly harm the two children but failed to act to prevent harm to them.

Secondly, the cost of another trial would place a serious financial burden on taxpayers of Branch County. The Branch County Prosecutor's Office would again have expert witness fees for state witnesses. Some key witnesses now live out of Michigan and would have had to be flown back for the trial.

Attorney Rhonda Ives was appointed to represent Wertz-Hale at county expense and the county footed the bill for defense expert witness Dr. Pinhus Geva, chairman of the Pediatrics Department at Sparrow Hospital in Lansing. His bill was for \$4,000 for services. The main reason Colbeck sought to withdraw was he could not have gone forward without a defense expert. Jonathan Hale could not afford to pay for one. Because of past appellate court ruling the Circuit Court would have had to pay for his expert at public expense.

Colbeck said his client agreed to the no contest plea "to bring finality to this matter." The case has been in court for three and one-half years through several appeals.

While Hale's plea concerned only the two-year-old daughter, Branch County Circuit Court Judge Michael Cherry said both victims would be considered under the Michigan Sentencing Guidelines.

A presentence investigation will now be completed.

Last month, Judge Cherry sentenced the stepmother to five years probation, 120 days in jail, then two days a month for the five years. She was convicted of a four-year felony.

Parents admit guilt in '06 baby death

Published Wednesday, February 14, 2007 4:14:40 PM Central Time

By MARGARET LEVRA

Globe Staff Writer

BESSEMER -- Two Ironwood residents charged in the Jan. 1, 2006 death of their infant child have entered guilty pleas to a felony count of second-degree child abuse, according to Prosecutor Richard Adams. The charge carries a maximum prison term of four years.

Richard Shinaway, 25, and Shannan Peterson, 24, entered the pleas at a joint hearing in Gogebic County Circuit Court, with Judge Roy Gotham presiding.

According to a court document, both Shinaway and Peterson were alleged to have "caused serious physical or mental injury to their child, Madisen, by resuming a caretaker role while intoxicated by alcohol and marijuana, knowing that the only other available caretaker was similarly incapacitated."

Madisen Shinaway, the couple's first child, was 6 weeks old when she died.

Under the plea agreements, Adams dismissed more serious charges of involuntary manslaughter, a felony with a 15-year maximum prison term. He agreed to recommend that Peterson's conviction is subject to a one-year delay of sentence and that Shinaway's sentence be no more than one year in the county jail.

In turn, both Shinaway and Peterson stipulated the Circuit Court Family Court Division take

jurisdiction of their new child, Bryce Shinaway, who was born on Jan. 2, for a period of two years, Adams said.

During that time, both Shinaway and Peterson will abide by a case service plan to be formulated by the Gogebic Department of Human Services. At Adams' recommendation, the plan will require attendance at Narcotics Anonymous meetings and parenting classes.

Both cases had been set for circuit court jury trials.

Asked what happened on Jan. 1, 2006, Peterson first described that the couple had smoked marijuana and drank alcohol.

"Did you then resume a caretaker role?" Gotham asked.

"Yes," Peterson said.

"Were you drunk?" Gotham asked.

"Yes," she replied.

"Were you high?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Was anyone else available who wasn't drunk or high?" asked Gotham.

"No," Peterson said, shaking and sobbing.

"Did you cause serious harm?" the judge asked.

"Yes," she replied.

"Your child died as a result?" Gotham said.

"Correct," she answered.

Asked the same question, Shinaway said, "We went home drunk and high and sent the babysitter home. I babysat and put her to bed and then passed out

myself," he said.

"Did you resume a caretaker role?" the judge asked.

"Yes," Shinaway said.

"Did Madisen die as a result?" Gotham asked.

"Yes, your Honor," Shinaway said.

Gotham found the pleas to be voluntary, accurate and understanding, and accepted both. He asked about the status of the new child and of the family, and learned the new child was living with the couple. Both Shinaway and Peterson reported they were working.

Shinaway's bond was then terminated, and he was remanded to jail. Gotham granted Shinaway day parole so that he can go to work, and if set up, so that he could attend parenting classes.

Sentencing for both has been scheduled for April 3 at 1 p.m.

Shinaway was represented by public defender James McKenzie and Peterson by Ironwood attorney Michael Pope.

The case was investigated by the Ironwood Public Safety Department, with PSO Jamie Chiapuzio and Det. Rod Passuello playing key roles. Child Protective Services worker Chanda Corullo also played an instrumental role in the investigation, Adams said.

Following an extensive preliminary examination in May, Gogebic County District Court Judge Anders B. Tingstad, in a July 21 order, ruled all charges would be dismissed against Shinaway and that Peterson would be bound over on the second-degree child abuse charge.

Charges against Shinaway and Peterson were re-instated in November.



Mother faces trial in abuse case

Thursday, February 15, 2007

By Barton Deiters

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- A Walker woman accused of videotaping her 8-year-old daughter's sexual abuse at the hands of the girl's stepfather was ordered Wednesday to stand trial on felony charges.

Meanwhile, the woman's husband, a registered sex offender, remains in a Pennsylvania jail facing extradition to Grand Rapids for his role in the alleged assaults.

Victoria Dean, 30, made a brief appearance before Grand Rapids District Judge Benjamin Logan. She waived her probable cause hearing and maintained she is not guilty of charges of first- and second-degree criminal sexual conduct and using a computer for child pornography -- offenses that carry a possible life sentence.

Dean's husband since 2005, Michael Melvin Dean, was arrested last week near Philadelphia on similar charges.

According to police, the Deans abused the girl and videotaped the actions at least twice last summer in a Northeast Grand Rapids home where Michael Dean was living at the time.

However, Victoria Dean's lawyer said there are conflicting accounts. John Pyrski said the child never complained of abuse and that there are medical reports which fail to document the claims.

"There's a lot to this," Pyrski said. "There's a lot of things that don't make sense."

The girl's biological father has said he became suspicious after Victoria Dean allegedly told him last June that the then-7-year-old was wearing a maxipad because she was bleeding.

The father said he found out his daughter's stepfather was a registered sex offender, and kept the child away from the Deans until the stepfather got a job out of state. He said he then allowed Victoria Dean to see the child, but contacted police.

Reached Wednesday, the child's biological father declined to comment further. The child is being cared for by a paternal grandparent.

According to Michigan State Police records, Michael Dean pleaded no contest to possession of child sexually abusive material in September 2005 -- the Deans were married at the time.

Michael Dean's 18-month probation included keeping away from schools, playgrounds, parks and child care centers. He also was to have no sexually stimulating material, not own a computer and complete treatment.

His probation was still in place at the time the alleged incidents occurred with his stepdaughter.

Dean's arrest record also includes having a firearm illegally at Grand Valley State University and a conviction for having a switchblade in 1997.

No extradition hearing has been set for Michael Dean. Grand Rapids Detective Dan Adams said it is not known if Dean will fight being returned to Michigan.

Victoria Dean remains in the Kent County Jail on \$100,000 bond.

Court records show her parental rights for two other children were terminated in 2004.

Send e-mail to the author: bdeiters@grpress.com

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State Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board

MIRS, February 14, 2007

Douglas **PATTERSON** , of East Lansing, was appointed to succeed Robert **TISCH**, whose term ended, to represent the general public for a term starting Feb. 13, 2007, and ending Dec. 19, 2008

Rebecca **BAHAR** , of Lansing, was reappointed to represent the general public for a term ending Dec. 19, 2009

Anita **FOX**, of Okemos, was reappointed to represent legal services for a term starting Feb. 13, 2007 and ending Dec. 19, 2009

Nancy **MOODY** , of East Lansing, was reappointed to represent the private sector for a term ending Dec. 19, 2009.



U.S. one of worst places for kids

Study cites family time as a factor

February 15, 2007

BY DAVID McHUGH

ASSOCIATED PRESS

BERLIN -- The United States and Britain ranked at the bottom of a UN survey of child welfare in 21 wealthy countries that assessed everything from infant mortality to whether children ate dinner with their parents.

The Netherlands, followed by Sweden, Denmark and Finland, finished at the top; the United States was 20th, and Britain was 21st, the report released Wednesday by UNICEF said.

Researcher Jonathan Bradshaw said children fared worse in the United States and Britain -- despite high overall levels of national wealth -- because of greater economic inequality and poor levels of public support for families.

"What they have in common are very high levels of inequality, very high levels of child poverty, which is also associated with inequality, and in rather different ways, poorly developed services to families with children," said Bradshaw, a professor of social policy at the University of York in Britain.

"They don't invest as much in children as continental European countries do," he said, citing the lack of day-care services in both countries and poorer health coverage for children in the United States.

The study also gave the United States and Britain low marks for their higher incidences of single-parent families. Britain was last, and the United States was second from the bottom in the category based on the percentage of children who lived in single-parent homes or with stepparents, as well as the percentage who ate the main meal of the day with their families several times per week.

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From the Daily: Adopting equality

Joint adoption restrictions arbitrary and discriminatory

Posted: 2/15/07

Once upon a time in Washtenaw County, gay and lesbian couples were allowed to adopt children jointly just the same as heterosexual couples. Then in 2002, a Washtenaw County judge declared that only married couples could adopt children jointly. Given state laws prohibiting gay marriage, gay couples were out of luck, the social progress this area takes so much pride in utterly stunted.

On Monday, State Rep. Paul Condino (D-Southfield) introduced legislation that - if it overcomes the perennial biases and bickering in the state House - would bring much needed sanity and equality to the state's adoption laws.

State law allows only married (and therefore heterosexual) couples to adopt a child and receive joint-custody rights. While unmarried couples (homosexual couples included) are permitted to adopt children, only one of the partners can truly have custody rights. Rather than providing a loving, secure home environment that we all agree is critical for a healthy childhood, this system of exclusion causes insecurity and uncertainty. And this is nothing compared to the bureaucratic headaches that befall the family if some misfortune fells the legal guardian.

For example, if the legal guardian of an adoptive child contracts a terminal illness, he cannot simply turn over custody rights to a partner or even another family member without heading to court first. Should that legal guardian die or become incapacitated while the legal system takes its winding course, the child is removed from a loving home where one parent still remains and is deposited into the volatile foster care system.

Discrimination against gay couples was exacerbated in 2004 when the state banned gay marriage in a ballot proposal. This ballot initiative codified the court ruling two years prior by defining marriage as an exclusive institution reserved only for heterosexual people. So it isn't so much that the state bars same-sex couples from adopting jointly, it simply bars unmarried couples from doing so. Because they cannot legally marry, the state's current adoption laws discriminate against gay couples.

Condino's legislation would rectify the situation by allowing unmarried partners to adopt children jointly, thus establishing a loving, two-parent home and avoiding a complicated legal struggle and the tribulations of foster care should tragedy strike.

Not surprisingly, the voices of intolerance on the religious right, particularly the Michigan Catholic Conference, oppose Condino's bill because they claim unmarried couples, especially same-sex ones, threaten the well-being of children by failing to provide "traditional family structure." These religious groups would rather have children run through the turbines of state-controlled foster care than live in a loving, two-parent environment. And they claim to have the children's best interest at heart.

If the state legislature passes Condino's proposal, marital status (and thus sexual orientation) will not be a determining factor in a couple's application for joint adoption. Instead, the determining factors will justifiably focus upon the couple's ability to provide a safe, loving home for the child. There are good and bad potential adoptive parents in every group - married or unmarried, gay or straight - and legislators should ensure that they put the safety and well being of children before any political agendas.

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Ann Arbor News Letters

February 15, 2007

Same-sex benefits are a lifeline for many

On Dec. 8, I had a diagnosis of leukemia and pneumonia. I had a job working in a child care center for children ages 2 weeks to 5 years. I will not be able to return to this line of work due to the fact of having to rebuild my immune system, since children basically have no immune system. I had insurance with this center.

In October, my partner and I decided that we would go with her insurance since she works for the University of Michigan and it offers a better coverage plan. We also wanted to carry our children on this plan as well.

My partner is worried sick that I could lose my insurance coverage. I am so grateful it was me who got sick because the kids are her biological children. Who would cover them and her if it had been reversed?

We need your help! Partners and/or parents should not have to worry about insurance for their family, especially if you work for a company that offers domestic partnership benefits.

Peg M. Gordon, Ann Arbor



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

State cuts put handcuffs on aid to mothers

Thursday, February 15, 2007

By Cedric Ricks

cricks@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8557

A new initiative by Kalamazoo County to improve the health of expectant mothers and reduce infant mortality has stalled.

Cuts recommended by Gov. Jennifer Granholm in her 2008 state budget proposal have prompted county officials to delay creation of the Nurse Family Partnership.

Announced in December, the program was to be funded by a three-year, \$1.3 million grant from the Michigan Department of Community Health. But Granholm, in her 2008 budget, has proposed cutting that grant by \$200,000, said Dale Hein, director of the Kalamazoo County Health and Community Services Department.

Hiring of program staff was to begin within days, but Hein said the county can't start a program knowing that a significant amount of funding could be in jeopardy. The Legislature is expected to make a decision on funding in late summer.

"We will hold off on doing any hiring," Hein said. "It still has to be approved by the Legislature. I can tell you, there will be a lot of advocacy out there for 2008."

The \$1.3 million grant includes some matching funds from Medicaid and other local sources such as foundations, Hein said.

The Nurse Family Partnership was going to pair a team of four nurses and a supervisor with 100 first-time, at-risk mothers and their children. The program's target population was blacks and Kalamazoo city residents. Nurses in the program were to stay in contact with mothers from the 28th week of pregnancy through their children's second birthdays.

If the state cuts \$200,000 from the grant, the program would also lose a \$134,000 matching grant from Medicaid, which was included in the \$1.3 million figure, Hein said.

He said the county is still waiting for state funding for the current fiscal year for the program. Those dollars have not been slated for cuts, he said.

"I would suggest it's a significant road block, but I don't blame the county at all," Dr. Arthur James, an obstetrician and gynecologist at Borgess Women's Health, said of the proposed funding cut.

"It's hard to talk to somebody about taking a job (with the program) and only having enough money to pay them for one year."

James said the county has a serious problem with black infant mortality. The Nurse Family Partnership would help to address that by providing support for young first-time mothers, but also by working to reduce teenage pregnancy. He said teenagers are more likely to have babies that don't survive infancy.

Nationally, the infant-mortality rate for whites was 5.65 deaths per 1,000 births during 2004 -- the most recent data available -- while the rate among black infants was more than twice that, or 13.65 deaths per 1,000 births, James said.

On the state level, infant-mortality rate for black babies in Michigan was 17.3 deaths per 1,000 births, while

the rate in Kalamazoo County was 20.8 deaths per 1,000 births. The rate for white infant deaths in the state and county mirrored the national numbers, James said.

Between 2000 and 2004 in Kalamazoo County, there were 12,684 white births and 92 white infant deaths, compared to 2,545 black births and 51 black infant deaths.

For white teens ages 15 to 19, there were 21.7 births per 1,000 teens in Kalamazoo County from 2000 to 2004; for black teens ages 15 to 19 for the same period, there were 97.1 births per 1,000 teens in the county, James said.

The data show black teens were 4.5 times more likely to give birth than white teens in Kalamazoo County from 2000 to 2004 -- a ratio that's the highest of any community in Michigan, James said.

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Michigan Report

February 14, 2007

COMMITTEE REPORTS BILL REQUIRING MEDICAID TO OFFER INCENTIVES

The Senate Health Policy Committee voted unanimously Wednesday to report a bill that would allow the Department of Community Health to offer incentives to Medicaid recipients who practice positive health behaviors.

Those incentives could include expanded benefits and incentives on premiums, benefits or co-pays. The bill also allows the department to create pay-for-performance incentives for health maintenance organizations contracted by Medicaid. The incentives would be for meeting health outcome targets for chronic diseases and patient compliance.

It would also let the department establish a preferred product and service formulary program for medical equipment and would give financial support for electronic health records and prescriptions and other health information technology programs.

[Sen. Tom George](#) (R-Kalamazoo), who chairs the committee and sponsored the bill, said the legislation gives the department the flexibility to create its own guidelines for incentives while helping Michigan residents.

“The bill’s consistent with the testimony we’ve heard and it’s consistent with the goal of trying to create a healthier Michigan,” Mr. George said.

The committee has heard testimony at the last two meetings from health officials who talked about the value of using incentives such as discounts on health care premiums or money to get people to take better care of their health such as quitting smoking, losing weight, eating healthier and exercising.

The committee heard testimony from Terri Stangl, executive director of the Center for Civil Justice, who said she supports the concept of the bill but wants to make sure the details don’t penalize people who face barriers to taking care of their health. She also wants to make sure any changes by Medicaid that would offer incentives wouldn’t take resources away from other services and was concerned the bill could allow Medicaid to use negative incentives to make people take care of their health when they didn’t have the means to do so.

It’s difficult to make someone go to a doctor’s appointment on time when they can’t leave work in the middle of the day, she said.

“We need to craft something that works in Michigan with our resources and isn’t overly ambitious,” Ms. Stangl said.

[Sen. Bruce Patterson](#) (R-Canton) said he appreciated Ms. Stangl’s concerns, but said previous testimony made him believe they couldn’t keep doing the same thing and expect the state to get healthier.

“Aren’t we almost compelled to take moves to encourage healthy behavior?” Mr. Patterson said.

Mr. George said the bill was designed to be flexible and allow the department to make decisions on incentives that will work best.

“It’s fairly general so as to allow the department lots of flexibility in designing the incentives,” Mr. George said. “Doing nothing is not an option any longer.”

[Sen. Gilda Jacobs](#) (D-Huntington Woods) said she wants to make sure the committee is also looking at extending the incentives to legislators and state employees; something Mr. George said can also be addressed.

[Sen. Hansen Clarke](#) (D-Detroit) also wanted the committee to look into expanding incentives to all residents and health care plans.

Mr. George, other members of the committee and officials from the department will meet to discuss the bill before it makes it to the House of Representatives, Mr. George said.

“We want to work with them and defer the details to their expertise,” Mr. George said.



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Published February 15, 2007

Safety: Support bill that allows GPS tools to protect domestic violence victims

A Lansing State Journal editorial

Lansing State Journal

Domestic violence remains as a sad and challenging scar on the face of our society. Often hidden, such acts of terror and abuse extract a price from all of us, especially when the cycle continues by influencing children who then are statistically more likely to commit abuse as adults.

A recently introduced piece of legislation may help protect victims and deserves support. The bill, from Rep. Bill Caul, R-Mount Pleasant, would give judges the ability to require those charged in domestic violence cases to wear GPS devices programmed to send alarms to their accuser if the wearer gets too close. Caul says costs of such equipment would be paid by the defendants.

Such extreme measures are not appropriate for every personal protection order. And it will be vital to make sure the tracking materials cannot be used by defendants to find their victims. (That's a real concern in a world where even cell phones have GPS features.) Once that concern is met, this could be a valuable tool for judges to use in certain cases.

Protection orders serve a purpose in reducing domestic violence, but they don't stop the most determined from dangerous and deadly acts. The bill was prompted in part by the sad case of Mary Babb, a Mount Pleasant woman who was slain outside her workplace. Her husband, Thomas Babb, is charged with murder. At the time of her death, Mary Babb had a protection order and Thomas Babb was free on bond after being charged with beating and assaulting her.

Domestic violence remains a problem. Although national numbers show some reduction, local agencies who work with victims report a strong need for their services. Eve Inc. (which stands for End Violent Encounters) reported a 70 percent increase in the number of protection orders sought between 2003-04 and 2005-06. While its shelter usage dropped, its hours of counseling services more than doubled.

GPS technology may not be needed in every case. We support giving judges the option when they think it may help avoid a tragedy. We urge politicians on both sides of the aisle to get this done.

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Thursday, February 15, 2007

Have read enough

Voice: Jeffrey T. Trischler, Essexville

Enough, please! I have heard and read enough of Nathaniel Abraham for the rest of my life.

For God's sake, this person took the life of another human being - for all intents and purposes, murdered somebody - and in the past few weeks he has been made into a celebrity; a virtual movie star.

When I was 11 years old, I most definitely knew what a gun was and I most definitely knew that if I pointed it at someone and pulled the trigger, someone might be severely injured or killed. If Nathaniel Abraham didn't know this at the age of 11, he never will, and he shouldn't be allowed to freely mingle with society on that count alone.

In order to protect myself from other human beings in this society, I am allowed to make judgments upon other people; that is my God-given and societal right.

Personally, I do not like the looks of Mr. Nathaniel Abraham. I find a look of criminal intent in his eyes and on his very countenance and I would not trust him "in a dark alley," as the saying goes; nor would I want any personal dealing with him.

And upon those statements I will make the prediction that Nathaniel Abraham will end up committing a crime and somehow end up back in a prison or jail context. I'll bet anybody in this world or town on this!

Furthermore, what's the big deal over an apology over a murder? You apologize to someone if you insult them or something, not if you kill. If somebody took the life of someone in my family I'd never want to see them again, let alone receive an apology. What does an apology bring back in a murder case?



Niles Daily Star

ONLINE EDITION

[Print Page](#)

Remember they are looking up to their dad

Wednesday, February 14, 2007 10:49 AM EST

While most fathers see June as the month they are remembered, the governor of Michigan would like to bring attention in February to the importance of responsible fatherhood.

Governor Jennifer M. Granholm's declaration of February as Responsible Fatherhood Awareness Month recognizes the "critical role dads play in their children's lives."

On Feb. 6, the fifth annual Fatherhood Conference was held with keynote speaker Mac Bledsoe, author of "Parenting with Dignity" and father of Dallas Cowboys quarterback Drew Bledsoe.

If you have ever watched a child following their father's footsteps, covering his tracks pushing a toy lawnmower, you would know the child's goal of being like their dad.

Rather than teaching bad words, poor habits and unhealthy choices, a father can become a good example to their offspring.

By being honest, caring for others and taking care of himself, a father can directly influence his son or daughter's behavior.

Even those parents who only have visiting rights can make use of the time they have to be positive, show how proud they are of their child and encourage good behavior.

Don't limit shared activity to sports. Dads can read to their kids or listen to their youngsters read to them. Board games develop social skills and can be a fun way to interrelate.

Remember too to attend school parent nights. Showing you care about how they are doing in school can cause the child to also care.

The old adage "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree" can be a sense of pride for any dad. Look in the mirror and decide what you want your son or daughter to see and become.

Mulhern Speaking At Fatherhood Event

MIRS, February 14, 2007

First Gentleman Dan **MULHERN** will be the guest speaker at the Fatherhood Awareness Month Open House. The event will be from 9:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m., Friday, Feb. 16 at the Department of Human Services office in the Grand Tower Office Building in Lansing.

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Article published Feb 15, 2007

Program gives deadbeat dads second chance

Child-support violators would do community work, job assistance

One of the disconnects about jailing parents who don't pay child support is the punishment doesn't correct the crime. Incarceration arguably gets the deadbeats' attention. It just doesn't guarantee missing child-support payments would be restored.

Like many states, Michigan has gone after deadbeat parents. In fact, state Attorney General Mike Cox said his Child Support Division collected more than \$13.2 million in unpaid aid last year.

The threat of jail time undoubtedly was a significant factor in persuading delinquent parents to pay up. Still there always is the question about the logic in imprisoning those who owe, but cannot pay.

The St. Clair County Friend of the Court has come up with a partial answer, at least. Its leaders are advocating the Jail Alternative Program. Inmates doing time for failing to pay child support would be put on work release.

To qualify, an inmate must first make a minimum payment to the custodial parent. A judge would determine the amount. The inmate must have no history of violent offenses, sexual assault or personal-protection orders and must be someone who had been making regular payments but stopped because of something such as losing a job.

Program participants will work at county parks in conjunction with the St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Department. The inmates won't be paid, but they must look for new jobs through Michigan Works.

The premise isn't perfect. Critics will say those incarcerated for child-support violations can't make good on their obligations unless they are working. At least the work-release program points them toward that goal.

Let's be clear. The new county jail already is facing the threat of overcrowding. As important as holding deadbeat parents accountable to their families, jail officials must find ways to relieve the demand on jail space. The Jail Alternative Program promises to help do that.

In the process, said Susan Borovich, the Friend of the Court's director, participants could become more responsible.

"The end result, we believe, is going to instill more pride in the person that's not paying child support," Borovich said. "And it will allow them time to find a job, so the end result is they will make regular child-support payments."

There are many reasons parents don't meet their responsibility. But, there is no excuse that justifies eluding that obligation.

In a perfect world, jail would not have to be the stick that compels parents to do right by their children. In this one, however, spending time behind bars regrettably is one of the most effective ways to make deadbeat parents accountable.

This new program proposes an alternative that recognizes the jail must house the community's most dangerous criminals. It also gives irresponsible parents a chance to change their lives for the better.



Muskegon Chronicle Live

Wednesday, February 14, 2007

State wants to attract more migrant workers

"Venga a Michigan!"

Michigan state government officials hope that Spanish slogan, which in English means "Come to Michigan," translates into more migrant farmworkers coming to Michigan to pick crops, and fill other agricultural-related jobs this year.

The invitation is part of a promotional effort that Michigan's Department of Labor and Economic Growth is using to try to lure potential workers to the state.

Several department officials last week visited nine sites in Texas to make their pitch. The annual trek targets towns with large Hispanic populations that also have high unemployment rates, officials say.

The goal was "to promote Michigan agriculture and the various services available," Rick Olivarez, a state monitor advocate said during the Michigan Interagency Migrant Services Committee Meeting held in Lansing on Tuesday.

The meeting was attended by two dozen representatives from various social service agencies.

"We met with about 400-500 families," said Olivarez, who shared highlights from the trip. "I think it was received well."

Agriculture is the second largest industry in Michigan. According to state census figures, approximately 90,000 migrants come to Michigan each year to pick crops work in canning factories or do other agricultural-related jobs. But state officials and migrant advocates want to avoid a repeat of last year when some farmers and other employers had difficulty finding enough workers.

For the complete story, return to Mlive.com Thursday or pick up a copy of Thursday's Muskegon Chronicle.

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Community Action House seeks donor, volunteers

Thursday, February 15, 2007

By Greg Chandler

The Grand Rapids Press

HOLLAND -- Wearing his white chef's jacket, Jim Piersma pulled a large aluminum pan, filled with macaroni and cheese, out of the oven at the Western Theological Seminary commons.

"We are a go," Piersma announced to volunteers working at the Community Kitchen, which offers about 100 meals each weekday.

Piersma, who has worked in the food service industry for about 20 years, says he's able to reach out to people through his work as coordinator of the kitchen. He wants to help people in need, much like he was helped when times were tough.

"They get a clean place to go, they get fellowship, they get a hot meal," Piersma said.

In 2003, Piersma first became involved in the Community Kitchen, not by choice. He had been sentenced to 360 hours of community service after a third drunk driving conviction.

Once his community service was done, he continued to volunteer at the kitchen.

Finally, he was offered the opportunity to take over management of the kitchen last year.

"This is fulfilling for me," Piersma said.

Facing the challenges of trying to provide services to people in need during sometimes trying economic times is a challenge for Community Action House.

That's why agency officials are starting a new initiative, 365 Circle.

The effort is to strengthen its base of fiscal support and to get people in the Holland area more involved in the organization.

"It'll result in more efficient and effective programs, and provide a steady stream of funding for those programs," Community Action House Executive Director Mark Tucker said.

The program allows pledges for as little as \$1 a day and welcomes volunteers.

During the 2005-06 fiscal year, Community Action House provided more than 22,000 hot meals through the Community Kitchen. That's part of the nearly 189,000 meals the agency provided to the community through the kitchen, as well as food pantries at its 14th Street headquarters and Macatawa Resource Center.

Community Action House also provided more than 177,000 items of clothing, furniture and other items and served nearly 100 families who were at risk of living on the streets through a homelessness prevention program.

Piersma believes in the agency's mission.

"If Community Action House wasn't there, there'd be 100 to 120 people who might not get lunches," he



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Help people heat their homes

Thursday, February 15, 2007

What: 14th annual Kalamazoo County Walk for Warmth.

When: Saturday. Registration starts at 8:30 a.m. and the walk at 9 a.m.

Where: First Baptist Church, 315 W. Michigan Ave., downtown Kalamazoo.

Why: To help those in need pay their energy bills.

How to get involved: Be a walker and secure donations from others. Organize a group to walk. Sponsor walkers or send donations to Walk for Warmth, 3299 Gull Road, 2nd Wing/3rd Floor, Kalamazoo, MI 49048.

Contact: Wanda Hurt at the Kalamazoo County Community Action Bureau, (269) 373-5066.

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Michigan Report

February 14, 2007

SENATE PASSES SUPPLEMENTAL, DEPARTMENT CONTROL BILLS

Legislation to both help close the books on the 2005-06 budget and to help prevent future incidents of departmental overspending won approval by the Senate on Wednesday. However, the House Appropriations Committee later removed a tie bar to the two bills effectively rendering the overspending oversight dead.

State budget director Bob Emerson told reporters that [SB 184](#), which would require the state to notify the Legislature by line-item which budgets may be in danger of overspending by each June, could force the state to add staff to simply comply with that requirement at the same time officials are trying to conduct target setting discussions for the next budget.

Also sent to the House was [SB 166](#), passed 36-0, that would appropriate a total of \$58.4 million, \$49.7 million in general funds, in an effort to close the 2005-06 budget.

The budget is aimed largely at closing the hole left in the budget when the Departments of Corrections, State Police and Human Services overspent their appropriations for the year.

The budget allocates \$15.4 million to the Department of Corrections, all in general funds. To DHS, \$30.7 million, all in general funds is allocated. And to State Police \$3.6 million, all in general funds, is allocated.

There are also appropriations made in the budget to the Department of Environmental Quality, the Michigan Strategic Fund, and the Department of Military and Veteran Services.

While Republicans have been furious over the three departments overspending, a memo from the Senate Fiscal Agency in December indicated that in only one-year in the last 15 years has no department overspent. And Mr. Emerson said departments have overspent their budgets for decades and that is often a fact of reality.

House Appropriations Chair Rep. George Cushingberry (D-Detroit) said the subcommittees would play a larger role in checking in on departments after the budget is completed. House Republicans on the panel said they did want to see the tie bar, or at least the issue brought up in SB 184 addressed.

said.

Send e-mail to the author: lakeshore@grpress.com

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Published February 15, 2007
[From Lansing State Journal]

Thursday's letters to the editor

Services cost \$\$

Our esteemed legislators are accomplished finger-pointers. Come a fiscal crisis, they home in on state employees in the same vein as their guru, John Engler, once did.

Rep. Rick Jones, R-Grand Ledge, grouses that three state agencies were over budget; he's merely demonstrating his inexperience with a state accounting system that demands budgets be written three years in advance.

One department head apologized for it. Wow. Private contractors don't when they bleed the state.

Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop, R-Rochester, suggests rescinding a contracted state employee pay raise of 3 percent. What about the infamous 38 percent pay raise bestowed upon the Legislature during the last fiscal crisis?

Taxpayers want lean, mean state government with no frills. But they also don't want murdered foster children or long lines at the Secretary of State. As always, we get what we pay for.

Marilyn Boucher
East Lansing



Social service group petitions Holland leaders

Thursday, February 15, 2007

By Shandra Martinez

The Grand Rapids Press

HOLLAND -- With City Council's annual retreat planned for Saturday, a group of social service agencies wants to give city leaders a message as they prepare to set priorities for the next fiscal year.

They are concerned the city's Community Social Services Assistance Program funding might not make it into the 2007-08 budget -- a possibility been mentioned by council members.

"Some may question the city's role in funding services and offer alternatives, such as believing it should be the role of churches," said Larry Erlandson, speaking to council during its Wednesday study session on behalf of the Lakeshore Nonprofit Alliance. "We believe that meeting social services needs in the community cannot be the role of any one institution alone.

It takes many partnerships, and we believe the city is one of the those necessary partners."

The organization represents 34 social service agencies.

Erlandson also is executive director of Evergreen Commons, a senior center that receives about \$52,000 a year in city allocations. This funds case coordination, adult day care and homemaker services for homebound seniors.

Mayor Al McGeehan reiterated his long-held concern that the city picks up most of the tab for social services in the Holland area.

"I believe we have to be supported by other units of government that call Holland home," McGeehan said. "I realize that you -- all the agencies -- are stuck in the middle. We are no longer the deep pockets in the Holland community.

"Holland Township has a greater (taxable value) than the city," he added.

The mayor urged them to make the same request to other governmental units where the agencies provide services.

Erlandson said he hoped the alliance could be a catalyst for change by developing a collective voice for non-profits in the area.

The city annually allocates about \$150,000 in CSSA grants to non-profit organizations, plus \$50,000 in Community Development Block Grants, said City Manager Soren Wolff.

An indication of the rising need for social services is the increased calls to the local 211 service, Wolff noted. Calls climbed to 10,014 in 2006 from 2,102 in 2002, when the community access line was unveiled.

Of that total, 2,094 came from Holland city and 1,980 from Holland Township, followed by 1,443 from Grand Haven city.

The top requests were for rent payment assistance and food assistance.